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DATE September 28, 1987
TIME 6:30-7:00 PM
NETWORK ABC
PROGRAM World News Tonight

ACCOUNT NUMBER 63/3514-NX
NIELSEN AUDIENCE 13,362,180

Peter Jennings, anchor:

It's a big debate in Washington today. The former CIA William Casey, the Watergate Bob Woodward and the question: Did Casey really tell Woodward that he knew all along about the diversion of Iran arms money to the Contras while he was on his deathbed? The White House said today not even President Reagan was able to talk to Casey at the time because doctors believed he couldn't handle a phone conversation. Woodward stands by his story, which is the talk of Washington. ABC's John Martin is there.

John Martin reporting:

The book's reporting of Casey's years at the CIA has created a storm of denial and denunciation.

Ray Cline (Former Dep. CIA Director): It's clearly a hatchet job on Bill Casey and the CIA. I think there's a lot of fakery in this book.

Rep. Dick Cheney (R-Intelligence Committee): If Bill Casey spent, over a period of several years, a number of hours talking with a reporter and if he discussed in those sessions classified information--covert action for example--I would deem that a breach of security and I hope he did not do it.

Martin: At the Washington Post today, Woodward had no comment. His book called "Veil" says Casey nodded yes on his hospital bed that he knew all along of the diversion of funds to the Contras.

John Greaney (Assoc. Fmr. Intelligence Ofcrs.): I don't like the idea that--that Woodward is putting things into Casey's mouth.

Martin: Casey's widow and daughter say Woodward could not possibly have interviewed the dying CIA director in the hospital, but high government and congressional officials said today they have good reason to believe Woodward was actually escorted into the room by a CIA official without the family's knowledge, but no official is sure Casey understood the questions.

According to a source close to Woodward, dissident CIA officials, alarmed by Casey's actions, gave Woodward thousands of pages of secret documents. The book says Casey approved training an assassination team of foreigners to set off a car bomb in Beirut to kill a suspected terrorist leader. The CIA said today it sees no value in debating the authenticity of the book. The spokesman said the attempted assassination of Sheik Fadlallah was an old story. About eighty persons were killed, but the sheik was not among them. That Casey spoke of this to Woodward...

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Rep. Lee Hamilton (Fmr. Chmn. Intelligence Cmte.): That, too, comes as a considerable surprise, even shock, to me.

Martin: CIA officials told ABC's John Scali they are shocked that Casey would speak to a man they regarded as the agency's prime journalistic enemy, and Casey supporters say they are stunned that he would go so far in helping the Contras and fighting terrorism. John Martin, ABC News, Washington.

470 Words
39 Clips

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